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*CALVIN AND SERVETUS*¹

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In the Genevan suburb of Champel, in an angle formed by the crossing of two unfrequented roads, stands a monument erected in the year 1903 by citizens of Geneva to commemorate an incident in the history of their community which for three centuries and a half has justly been regarded by critics as a blot upon its good name. The monument consists of a rough, irregular granite block about a man's height and resting upon a base of natural rock. On one side is the name of Michael Servetus, and on the other the following touching inscription:

FILS
RESPECTUEUX ET RECONNAISSANTS
DE CALVIN
NOTRE GRAND REFORMATEUR
MAIS CONDAMNANT UNE ERREUR
QUI FUT CELLE DE SON SIECLE
ET FERMEMENT ATTACHES
A LA LIBERTE DE CONSCIENCE
SELON LES VRAIS PRINCIPES
DE LA REFORMATION ET DE L'EVANGILE
NOUS AVONS ELEVE
CE MONUMENT EXPIATOIRE
LE XXVII OCTOBRE MCMIII

That such an inscription could be accepted as an expression of the best judgment of the modern Genevese in regard to this action of their fathers is evidence of a change of sentiment that has required all these three and a half centuries to come to its rights. During my travels two years ago I met a Genevan scholar of world-wide reputation in a field of knowledge that has kept him for the greater part of his active life far removed from the provincial feeling that might well cling to one who had never left the familiar scenes of early life. He was a member of an ancient

¹A lecture given in the Lowell Institute course at King's Chapel, Boston, January 25, 1909.

Genevan aristocratic family, still in possession of a landed estate that for six generations at least had been in the hands of his fathers. In the course of conversation I remarked upon the admirable action of his fellow-citizens in showing, though tardily, their sense of the historic significance of Calvin's terrible act of justice. In so doing I meant to pay to Geneva the respectful tribute of my humble admiration. But the response was not such as I had anticipated. Not even yet was this Genevan aristocrat quite ready to admit that his fellow-citizens had done well to recognize thus publicly their regret that the man to whom they as well as he looked back as the creator of their redoubtable commonwealth had allowed himself this one human slip. Even modified as their expression of regret was, even though they had guarded the reputation of Calvin by ascribing his fault to the Spirit of the Age, still it seemed to this sturdy conservative that any such confession of error could be only another outburst of that radical temper which was slowly transforming the Geneva of Calvin into a community more in sympathy with the liberalism of the modern world.

During my last visit, in 1907, the whole canton of Geneva was thrown into the greatest excitement by the proposition to withdraw all public support from the churches, in other words, definitely to separate between church and state. I found that the conservative elements, notably the remnants of the ancient aristocracy, however much the theory of a free church in a free state might appeal to them individually, were to a man united against putting it in practice in their own community. They dreaded still lest, if this ancient bond were severed, the inrush of the modern spirit of unrest, already in many ways threatening the fair fame of their city, should prove fatal to the traditions they valued. I believed this point of view to be wrong, because it seemed to me that the spirit of Calvin at his best as well as at his worst was still very much alive in this scene of his wonderful activities. For years, while the recognized churches of Geneva had been supported by public taxation, there had been also in existence a church of the type with which we are familiar. A preacher of great personal influence had gathered about him a congregation that Sunday after Sunday packed the largest assembly hall in

the city, paid its own bills, and was exercising in the whole community an influence greater than that of any other religious organization. It seemed to me that this was in so far evidence that Geneva was not likely to become less religious, but rather more so, when her own people were thrown upon their own resources to prove their loyalty to their great inheritance.

It has seemed worth while to take these hurried glimpses into the modern world of Genevan thought and feeling in order that we may the better understand—or come the nearer to understanding—the conditions of our subject. There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between this community in the year 1553 and the man who is to occupy us today. If there is one thing more than another that marks the Puritan commonwealth, it is the sense of obligation of the individual to submit himself to the higher judgment of the community as a whole, this judgment being expressed through its recognized organs. If we had to select one trait of Servetus that would express the man almost to the exclusion of all others, it would be his rampant self-assertion. It is in the dramatic opposition of these two qualities that the interest of his encounter with Calvin is mainly to be found.

Our information as to the origin and early life of Servetus is singularly meagre and untrustworthy. It is derived in great part from his own declarations made under the stress of trial for his life, and unhappily it appears quite certain that many of these declarations were more or less deliberately untrue. Furthermore there has not yet appeared any one successful effort to unravel the mystery of Servetus' life and thought. Frequent attempts have indeed been made. The most important contributor to our knowledge in recent times has been a Protestant pastor in Magdeburg, in Germany, by the name of Tollin, who, in a series of monographs published in several different periodicals and covering the eighth and ninth decades of the last century, has tried to clear up one after another of the puzzles presented by this enigmatic personage. It appears to have been Tollin's intention eventually to write the long-desired biography of Servetus, but he died before this could be accomplished. In England there is little beyond the careful study of Robert Willis, a physician who,

largely relying upon Tollin's work, but adding much on the side of Servetus' contributions to natural science, published in 1877 an interesting narrative account in one sizable volume. The libraries of Harvard College and the City of Boston have each a copy of the second imprint (1790) from the original edition of 1553 of the *Christianismi Restitutio*, the most important of Servetus' own writings. The copy in Harvard College was the property of my predecessor Professor Converse Francis, of the Harvard Divinity School, and has many manuscript notes in his hand.

Michael Servetus, alias Reves, alias Villeneuve (Villanova), was undoubtedly a Spaniard, a native either of Aragon or of Navarre. He was almost, if not exactly, of the same age as Calvin; born, that is, in the year 1509 or 1511. He came evidently of a family of some consideration and was given the best education possible to his time. His precocity is one of his most striking traits. He can hardly have been much over nineteen when he was selected by Father Quintana, the confessor of Charles, King of Spain and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, as in some sense his private secretary. Probably this choice was due to the boy's proficiency in languages; for he seems already to have had a practical command of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—very remarkable attainments at any time, but little less than phenomenal in a day when these studies, under the eager leadership of Erasmus and his fellow-workers, were just beginning to acquire a scientific standing in the educational centres of western Europe. Whatever his duties in the capacity of secretary may have been, the important thing in his relation to Quintana is his expedition to Italy, and thence into Germany, in the following of the Emperor. These were the months just after that terrible sack of Rome by the imperial army which resulted in the restoration of what was called peace between Papacy and Empire and the consequent strengthening of the Emperor's hands, so that he could turn his attention for the first time seriously to the religious movement in Germany.

Servetus was present at the triumphal entry of the Pope and the Emperor into Bologna, an event which left upon his sensitive mind a profound impression of the worldliness and unsanctity

of the papal institution, and prepared him unquestionably to expect to find among the reformers in Germany and Switzerland a condition of things more in harmony with the ideas of the religious life that were already shaping themselves in his independent thought. At Augsburg, whither the imperial journey was directed, Servetus was—or might have been—present at the meeting of the famous Diet of the Empire at which the Lutheran party presented their “Confession,” the fundamental document of German Lutheranism for all time. With the exception of Luther, the leading theologians of the party were gathered at Augsburg, and it would not have been impossible for the young Spaniard at least to have had speech of them, but there is, I think, no trace of any significant personal relations with them at this time. Pastor Tollin, it is true, makes as much as possible out of a brief notice of a conversation between Philipp Melanchthon and certain Spaniards in the antechamber of Quintana, but I cannot think this important. What has, however, a real bearing upon our subject is that the Lutherans at Augsburg were above all things interested in presenting their case to the Diet in such moderate terms that they might conciliate opposition. Their chief desire was to let Papacy and Empire see that they were not extremists. Radicalism in any form was as repellent to them as to their Catholic opponents. Schism, a division in the sacred unity of the church, was far from being their ideal solution of the religious conflict. In those paragraphs of the Confession which touch upon the radical tendencies of the day, they take every pains to show that these are not characteristic of their own ways of thought.

It is clear therefore that, in so far as the mind of Servetus was already leaping forward to the conclusions inevitable from his independent attitude, he was quite as little likely to find sympathy here as in the immediate surroundings of the imperial court. What it was that led to his parting company with Quintana we do not know. It is more than probable that some indiscretion on his part had revealed to the imperial confessor the danger that might come from his continued patronage of a man who dared think for himself and was already showing a perilous tendency to speak out his innermost thought. At all events, it is clear that shortly

after the Diet of 1530 Servetus was afloat upon the world, dependent for his living upon the exercise of his many talents.

For a short period he seems to have had the wherewithal to exist, and he improved this interval to make, or attempt to make, connections with the reformers of Switzerland. In their denunciations of radicalism the German Lutherans had pointed in unmistakable terms to their Swiss brethren. Only a year before, at the decisive conference between the two reforming churches at Marburg, they had drawn the lines of their differences so that henceforth their fundamental opposition of attitude toward the tradition of the church could not fail to be clear to every one. On the critical question of the transubstantiation the Swiss had crossed the line from the "sacramental" to the figurative interpretation, and thus definitely declared themselves for the natural or rational understanding of the whole system of Christian thought. When, therefore, he had failed to make connections with the Germans, it was quite natural for Servetus to imagine that he might receive from the Swiss the kind of welcome which his own rapidly advancing thought would seem to warrant. He began at this time a series of letters—unfortunately lost, and known to us only by the writings of his opponents—in which he called upon the leading Swiss theologians to give their opinions in regard to his views about the primary propositions of Christian speculation. It is clear from the comments of his correspondents that he was already well started along the several roads which his maturer thought was to follow. The impression he made upon them was that of a restless, half-irresponsible youth, losing himself in the mazes of a philosophy that was more heathen than Christian. The chief theologian of Basel, Oecolampadius, complained to Zwingli, the leader of the church at Zürich, that he was being tormented by a Spaniard who had put forward doctrines in regard to the person of Christ which savored strongly of Arianism. He had declared that Christ was not consubstantial and co-eternal with God. It is interesting to notice that Oecolampadius criticizes Servetus especially for implying that in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament it is always a future Son of God that is predicted. He would not admit, says his critic, that the eternal Son of God was to appear as man, but only that a man

was to come who should be the Son of God. This is the earliest intimation we have as to the speculations which were occupying the mind of the young scholar. It is highly significant that from the start he was impressed with what we should now call the historical view of theology. As he read the Old Testament, its writers seemed to him to be referring to things that their hearers would understand. Their gaze into the future was limited by the fortunes of their people at the moment. To imagine them possessed of all the divine mysteries and to have in mind the person of the man Jesus as the ultimate object of all their prophetic vision was to reflect back the knowledge of history into a past to which such knowledge was impossible. So far as I can understand him, this is the key to all Servetus' later thought. His manner of expressing himself is confusing and intricate to the last degree, so much so that neither in his own time nor since has any one quite dared to say that he understood it. To his contemporaries he was a half-mad fanatic; to those who have studied him, even sympathetically, his thought remains to a great extent enigmatical; but this one point is fairly clear: that he grasped, as no one up to his time had grasped, this one central notion, that, whatever the divine plan may have been, it must be revealed by the long, slow movement of history—that, to understand the record of the past, it must be read, so far as that is possible, with the mind of those to whom it was immediately addressed, and must not be twisted into the meanings that may suit the fancy of later generations.

To have seized upon such an idea as this—an idea which has begun to come to its rights only within our own memories—was an achievement which marks this youth of twenty as at all events an extraordinary individual, a disturbing element in his world, a man who was not likely to let the authorities rest calmly in possession of all the truth there was.

These earliest speculations seem to have occupied Servetus during the latter part of the year 1530. If he seemed to be entering into a field of thought where speculation was out of place and where it was the manifest duty of the Christian man to accept the teaching of authority and be happy, we must remind ourselves that in the year 1530 this question of authority was precisely the

one as to which no final answer was possible. The whole world of thinking men was disturbed by the stirring of a spirit of inquiry and criticism that would not be held in check. In the thirteen years just preceding, the Lutherans in Germany had been working out their protest into a scheme of doctrine and of organization which had just been put before the world at Augsburg in such a form that it was clear there was to be no going backward from it. Carried along on the wave of this more conservative Lutheranism there had gone side-currents of radicalism that within five years were to culminate in the horrors of Münster, and thus to show all the elements of order in society how carefully they must guard themselves against this insidious foe. Switzerland had developed its own triumphant Protestantism, differing alike from that of the Lutherans and of the now discredited radicals. John Calvin was a student at Paris, laying the foundations of that system which in the next five years was to ripen out into the scheme of theology that was to prove the most effective agent in the spread of the reformed faith. Erasmus, living at Basel at the moment, was serving now the cause of revolt and now that of reaction, as the pressure of the case seemed to warrant. Even the organized mechanisms of the Roman tradition were proving unequal to the task of satisfying the restless spirit that was abroad among its own enlightened followers. Where was a young, eager, inquiring scholar in the year 1530 to look for satisfaction if not into the inner depths of his own honest thought?

Such, so far as we can trace it, is the genesis of the first important work by which Servetus drew upon himself the attention of the learned world. In the course of the year 1531 appeared the treatise, *De Trinitatis Erroribus Libri Septem*. It was printed at the little town of Hagenau in Alsatia, and bore on its title-page the name "Michaellem Serveto, aliàs Reves, ab Aragonia, Hispanum," but no indication of the publisher or the place of publication.²

In the months immediately preceding its appearance, Servetus had been, as we have seen, in frequent relations with the leaders

²I am indebted for a copy of this very rare book to Dr. Samuel Macauley Jackson, of New York. The Library of Harvard University contains a manuscript copy of perhaps the seventeenth century.

of the Swiss Reformation, and seems also to have had friendly dealings with the heads of the reformed church at Strassburg, Bucer and Capito. His name was on the title-page of this terrible book, and yet it appears to be a fact that he was not personally identified with its authorship until shortly before he appeared on trial for his life twenty years later at Geneva. The essential point of Servetus' error in this first formal presentation of his thought is his treatment of the accepted doctrine of the Trinity. He starts, as all his predecessors along this same line had started, from the idea of the oneness of God as the necessary presumption of all thought about the divine being. It seemed to him that the church in its formulations had departed from this essential conception, and had wandered over into the region of polytheistic imaginings, from which it still believed itself to have escaped. In this aberration of the church he thought he saw the reason of its failure to appeal to the vast masses of mankind, notably to those peoples who had found in the monotheism of Islam the satisfaction of their religious demands. It seemed to him that, in its attempt to exalt the person of Christ, the church had in reality distorted it, and deprived it of its true relation to mankind.

The Christ idea as represented in the person of Jesus was to him worthy of all devotion. No language is too strong for him to express his almost extravagant sense of the dignity and elevation of this central figure of the Christian tradition. Like his great forerunner, Arius, he was willing to accept almost any description of the divine perfections of the redeeming Christ—only he would not admit the thought of his eternal existence. The word Trinity he could not find in the Scriptures, nor in the writings of the earliest Christian theologians of the formative period. Yet he had no objection to the term if only he might give it his own interpretation. He could quite comprehend the value of a method of approach to an understanding of the divine nature which sought to distinguish between the various forms in which that nature is revealed to men. He was willing to use the words "Son" and "Holy Spirit," provided only that these should not be thought of as separate existences by themselves. He did not even object to the word "Person," but insisted that it should be used in its

proper and original sense of a dramatic impersonation. He went back to the Greek equivalent *πρόσωπον*, and showed how this had been used by early Greek writers to express precisely this notion—that the several persons of the Trinity or Triad were only manifestations of the one single and indivisible idea of supreme Deity.

In a word, Servetus shows himself the intellectual kinsman of those thinkers of the second century who have come down to us as Monarchians. His thought reminds us at once of those opposite types of monarchian speculation which are identified with the names of Sabellius and Paul of Samosata. It was largely in combating these attempts to formulate Christian doctrine on a strictly monarchian basis that the creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries had been evolved. Those creeds represented a long series of compromises. They were the expression of an enforced unity, made possible through an alliance with the civil government, and supported by a theological method in which plain reason and the laws of the physical universe were subordinated to a religious ideal too lofty and too spiritual to admit of expression in language intelligible to ordinary human understanding. The creeds did their great work of welding together all the divergent forces of aggressive Christianity and concentrating them on the one great task of winning the world to the following of the Christ. That was their merit, and for that service they deserve our interest and our gratitude; but, like all formulations of human speech, they could win their victory only by a rigid exclusion of whatever tended to weaken their hold upon the blind acceptance of their followers. Above all else they excluded, and must exclude, all right of the individual mind to indulge in the free exercise of its own native powers upon the subjects they claimed once for all to have disposed of.

Upon this comparatively simple substructure of the great creeds the church had reared its fabric of doctrines and usages, for which it had tried to claim the same sanctity as for the creeds themselves. It had secured the same kind of support from the new civil governments of Europe that had been given it by the older civil government of Rome. It had evolved a new theology to maintain this new structure of faith and practice. That had gone

on until, from the early fourteenth century onward, one after another of its defences had been attacked, and in the great Protest of the sixteenth it seemed as if there were danger that they would be swept away entirely. The authority of the Papacy had been rejected. The sacramental system, the key to its hold on the consciences of men, had been reduced to its lowest terms. The whole theological method of the Middle Ages had been held up to the contempt of the enlightened intellect. Where should men stop?

The answer is to be found in the universal horror with which this first essay of Servetus was received in the circles where he thought he might most surely count upon a favorable hearing. The expressions of opinion that have come down to us are almost entirely from the Protestant regions of Switzerland and Germany. In Catholic France the book seems to have been little known. Almost without exception, the judgment of the Protestant leaders was hostile in the extreme. It is not that they were led into controversy with the daring author. Nothing could have pleased him better than that. It is rather as if some noxious reptile had suddenly appeared in their midst and threatened to poison the very springs from which they drew the sources of their own resistance to the dominant church. From Luther and from the heads of the Protestant communities in Switzerland and Upper Germany we have utterances that reflect the controversial temper of the age. Bucer in Strassburg, often known as the Peacemaker of the Reformation, seems at first to have listened with some patience, if not actual interest, to the Spaniard's vagaries, but now, having read his book, he publicly declares that such a man ought to be disembowelled and torn to pieces.

Philipp Melancthon, the theologian of the Lutheran party, was inclined to be a little more lenient. Servetus interested his eminently speculative mind; but, as he came to examine more carefully into his thought and to see whither it must lead, he too joined in the chorus of condemnation. The most he could say was that this whole subject of the Trinity was one involving a mystery, about which men ought to be careful in expressing definite opinions.

Disappointed in his expectations of finding sympathy among

those of his contemporaries who were themselves rebelling most distinctly against the existing church order, Servetus now left Germany and went over into France. There he dropped his proper family name and took that of Villeneuve (Villanovanus) from the name of his birthplace. So completely did he cover the traces of his life during the past few years that for the next twenty he was able to live and work with entire freedom and no little success in several lines of activity without, so far as we know, rousing the slightest suspicion that he was the Michael Servetus whose name stood on the title-page of the terrible pamphlet of 1531. His first visit was to Paris, where he lived for some time, perhaps supporting himself by the natural resource of teaching, while he was at the same time attending more or less of the instruction offered at the University. There was a tradition that in these earliest years at Paris he made the personal acquaintance of Calvin, and had plans for a public discussion with him on religious questions, but that this plan failed. There is, I believe, but slight foundation for a situation so full of dramatic suggestion for the future of the two youths; but it is more than probable that they were at Paris at the same time, and they may well have met in the gatherings of eager minds already deeply moved by the stirrings of the Reformation.

In 1534 we hear of Servetus at Orleans and at Avignon, and then at Lyons, where he settled for a time as a reader for the press of the famous publishers, the brothers Trechsel. It was while in their employ that he edited a new edition of Ptolemy's Geography, following the text of Wilibald Pirkheimer, the Nuremberg humanist, and adding commentaries of his own. In these commentaries Servetus brings in the scraps of learning about men and countries that he had collected from wide reading. They are of interest to us only as showing his irrepressible impulse to express what he had in his mind without special concern as to its relevancy. In connection, for instance, with the map of the Holy Land, he states the accepted tradition that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, but adds that this was mere boasting and falsehood, for the observations of modern travellers had shown that it was a barren, desolate region, without attractions of any kind. So that one might say that this "promised land" was anything but

a "promising land." This passage appears in the edition of 1535, but in the second edition of 1541 the whole section in regard to the Holy Land has disappeared.³

During his trial at Geneva, eighteen years later, this criticism of the Hebrew tradition was brought up against Servetus as proof of his readiness to question the trustworthiness of Moses as a recorder of geographical facts.

Soon after this, Servetus is again at Paris, living probably on the proceeds of his industry at Lyons, and now engaged in the study of medicine. He advanced here to the degrees of A.M. and M.D., and began to lecture on Ptolemy and on astrology, of the scientific nature of which he was, curiously enough, thoroughly convinced. He is reported to have been a successful lecturer and to have attracted large audiences. In any case he was widely known under his soubriquet of Villeneuve, and, though well known also to be of Spanish origin, no one seems to have connected him in any way with the dangerous doctrines of Servetus. Trouble, however, came upon him through his incredible devotion to the pseudo-science of astrology. He was prosecuted on this ground by the Medical Faculty, and examined by the Inquisitor of Paris as to his religious soundness. The Inquisitor satisfied himself of his orthodoxy, but he was then tried by the highest civil jurisdiction, the Parliament of Paris, for the offence of teaching and practising astrology. In spite of a vigorous defence, he was condemned, was forbidden to teach further, and ordered to withdraw the pamphlet in which he had presented an apology for the forbidden science.

Evidently a singular person, widely gifted, insatiable in his desire for knowledge, industrious, and with personal attractions that secured him friends; but erratic in his pursuits, restless under authority, and liable, as in this matter of astrology, to be led off into side-paths of speculation that might carry him over into regions of pure fantasy.

We next hear of Servetus at the little town of Charlieu, near Lyons, as a practising physician; but apparently some trouble with citizens of the place led to his removal in the year 1539 to Vienne, in the Rhône valley, where the Archbishop, Paumier,

³ Both editions are in the Library of Harvard University.

was a former friend and fellow-pupil of his Paris days. Here he really settled, and for the next fourteen years lived as a physician of good standing, occupied with studies in many fields, but never quite forgetting his early interest in theology. He re-edited Ptolemy, and in 1542 published an edition of the Bible in Latin from the text of Pagnini, with original notes, chiefly historical and literal, but without betraying any dangerous tendencies in the direction of criticism.

The final chapter in Servetus' life begins in 1546 or 1547. At that time he opened a correspondence with Calvin, still, of course, under his name of Villeneuve, and many letters passed between them. Those of Calvin are unfortunately lost, but those of Servetus are printed in his later book. They show that his mind was now turning with increasing interest to the problems that had occupied him sixteen years before, the fundamental questions of the Christian theology. His inquiries of Calvin related especially to the doctrine of the Trinity and the proofs necessary to establish it. It is evident that the tone of Calvin's answers was severe to the point of violence, and Servetus was not behind him in his use of vigorous language. In a letter written to Farel at this time, Calvin refers to this correspondence, and makes the afterwards famous declaration that, if he could lay his hands on the wretch who was publishing such outrageous views, he would never let him escape alive. Much has been made of this letter as showing the *animus* with which Calvin entered upon the fateful trial of 1553, but I hardly think too much weight should be laid upon it. Such an expression was quite in the natural order of sixteenth century controversy, and probably reflected nothing more than Calvin's natural horror at opinions that seemed to him nothing short of blasphemous. It is clear that Servetus had found himself rather strengthened than otherwise in the opinions of his youth by later study. What had been in 1530 the intuitive perceptions of an unusually clever youth had ripened in the interval into something that might be called a philosophy of life. His appeal to Calvin is perfectly in accordance with his action in the earlier stage of his thought. As he had then addressed himself to the leaders of what he supposed to be the most advanced theological thought, so now he turned to the man who more than any other

was shaping the thoughts of the Protestant world. His attitude then was not precisely humble, and it was not greatly changed now. He was not appealing to an authority now any more than then, but it would have been a great encouragement to him in the loneliness of his own researches if he could have gained the countenance of an acknowledged expert in his field. The result was, as it had been before, to throw him back upon himself, and to show him that, if his views were to win a place in the world, it must be in virtue of their own convincing force.

It is probable that in connection with his correspondence Servetus sent to Calvin a draft of the book which is his chief literary monument, the *Christianismi Restitutio*, which, however, was not to be printed until 1553. The leniency or indifference of the authorities in the good Catholic town of Vienne has always been a matter of wonder to the students of Servetus. It seems altogether probable that he was regarded there with the kind of indulgence which men everywhere and always are inclined to give to a "queer fellow" of undoubted gifts, useful in his way, though with notions that might perhaps be a little off color, but were not clearly perceived as dangerous. The Archbishop was his friend, and we must bear in mind that Villeneuve was so far not suspected of any connection with the forgotten heretic Servetus, of nearly twenty years before.

I wish I were at once theologian, philosopher, and natural scientist enough to make quite clear either to you or to myself just what this philosophy of life was that had half formed itself in the active brain of Servetus, and was now crowding for expression. So far as I can grasp it, it was based upon a profound conviction of the unity of all being, this unity expressing itself indeed in manifold forms, but these forms all correlated to each other and to the whole by an active principle which corresponds to his idea of God. Or, putting it in the reverse order, his idea of God was of a being so completely pervading all life that it was hardly to be distinguished from the things it so utterly filled and animated. The handiest word to describe an idea of this sort is "pantheism," and in fact the theology of Servetus has often been thus described. Yet he was quite ready to use most of the terminology of the

church, provided only that he might give to it his own interpretation.

The most curious illustration of this striving after a unity of life is to be found in the extraordinary discovery upon which he seems to have fallen in the course of his regular medical study and practice, but which he at once incorporates into his discussion of theology. There can be little doubt that Servetus had practised dissection of the human body, and had made himself familiar especially with the processes of foetal life. In the chapter of his book on the Restoration of Christianity in which he treats of the Holy Spirit, he attempts first a definition of the several spirits, the natural, the vital, and the animal, by which the human body is animated. In the course of his description of the vital spirit he tells how, in his opinion, the blood is sent from the right to the left ventricle of the heart, not, as was generally supposed, by passing through the mid-wall of the heart, but passing first through the pulmonary artery into the lungs and thence through the pulmonary vein into the left ventricle. The aëration of the blood in the lungs he describes as a mingling of the outer air with the rarer parts of the substance of the blood, thus producing the vital spirit, which is then communicated to the body through the red blood of the arteries. In other words, Servetus is the undoubted discoverer of so much of the fact of the circulation of the blood as relates to what is called the pulmonary circulation. Apparently he was led to his conclusions by the observations, first, that the mid-wall of the heart was not of a texture to permit as free passage for the blood as would be necessary, although a slight transfusion might take place, such as I am informed does actually occur in certain forms of disease; then, the reflection that so great a supply of blood could not be sent to the lungs merely for the purpose of nourishing them; and also that the left ventricle was too small to permit of the thorough mingling of the air with the blood whereby the vital spirit is produced. It is generally accepted as a fact that the rest of the process, the systemic circulation whereby the blood is returned to the heart, escaped the observation of Servetus, and it would certainly be presumption for a mere layman to assert the contrary. It is quite certain that he does not describe the process in any language that would correspond to

our modern description. It is certain that he did not understand the idea of capillary attraction. Yet one cannot quite overlook his remark that what he calls "the natural spirit" is communicated from the arteries to the veins "by their *anastomoses*." Some notion of a passage from the arteries to the veins he must have had. It must be remembered that he is writing not primarily a treatise on physiology, but on theology, and that his interest in the question was merely the definition of the vital spirit. I am not yet so far convinced by the arguments of Dr. Willis as to be perfectly sure, as he is, that the honor of this immense discovery is not to be ascribed in full measure to Servetus rather than to Harvey nearly a century later.

As to the book itself, the *Christianismi Restitutio* is an attempt to bring Christianity back to what Servetus believed to be its original conditions. It is not merely reform, it is restoration, that he has in mind. He finds the central fact of Christian speculation, not in the doctrine of the Trinity as formulated by the schools, but in the fact of the divine incarnation in the person of Jesus. He admits the divine birth, explaining it as in harmony with a general law of divine manifestation whereby the spiritual is revealed in the material. He would not accept the idea of an eternal sonship, except in this sense, that the divine Word, the Logos, had always been active as the expression in outward form of the divine activity. So, in the fulness of time, this same Logos produced a being from a human mother upon whom at the moment of his birth the divine Spirit was breathed. Obviously this is not the "eternal Son" of the creeds, and herein lay the especial theological crime of Servetus. In his criticism of the church order, of the papal government, of the sacramental system, he does not differ essentially from the more radical of the reformers. On the essential matters of baptism and the Eucharist he goes quite beyond the established reforming churches. In both cases he invokes the principle of plain reason. He rejects infant baptism on the ground that the infant can have no faith, and that the practice is therefore mere incantation. He denies transubstantiation on the rational basis that substances and accidents may not be separated, and does not spare the reforming leaders for what seemed to him their half-hearted attitude on this point. His language throughout

is harsh and violent, except where, as at the close of his chapters, he passes over into the forms of devotion and closes his diatribes with prayers of great beauty and spirituality.

This work was done by Servetus while he was living unmolested in a thoroughly Roman Catholic community, surrounded with all the mechanisms of detection and repression always at the disposal of the church. The printing was accomplished in secret, and a thousand copies were made ready for the market. It seems clear that an early copy reached Calvin, and confirmed him in his purpose, probably long since formed, to crush this enemy of all Christian men whenever the opportunity should occur. There is little room for doubt that the information upon which the authorities of Vienne were led to action reached them by way of Geneva. We have the correspondence between a French refugee, a friend of Calvin, and a Viennese friend of his upon which the proof is based. The authorities were informed that the supposed Villeneuve was no other than the wretch Servetus, and they at once proceeded to act. Servetus was arrested, examined, and imprisoned in the episcopal palace. His imprisonment seems to have been a rather nominal one; the garden gate was conveniently left open, and he had only to walk out and betake himself to a place of safety. The local inquisitor came into the affair just too late to recapture him, and had to be content with condemning his books and having him burned in effigy.

This brings us to the last scene in the tragedy of this singular life. Writers have exhausted their ingenuity in guessing why, of all places in the world, Servetus should have ventured into the Geneva of Calvin, the most outspoken enemy he had ever encountered. In his own testimony Servetus apparently wished to convey the idea that he was on his way to Italy, and that he had in fact made all arrangements for leaving Geneva after a short sojourn, when, having ventured into a public meeting, he was recognized by some one who reported his presence to Calvin and thus brought about his arrest. I am inclined to bring this Genevan visit into line with other earlier actions of Servetus, and to think that he was led by the same desire which had once led him to seek out the leaders of thought in Switzerland and Germany and to take the serious risks of a long correspondence with Calvin

himself. He was obviously a singular mixture of prudence and imprudence, and this time the imprudence got the better of him.

The account of this, one of the famous heresy trials of the world, is preserved to us in the formal records of the Genevan Councils and in the abundant contemporary writings. It has been the subject of a vast deal of sentimental criticism, and has served as the text for infinite demonstrations that Protestantism was no better than its predecessor in the matter of religious liberty, and that Calvin was a furious tyrant, thirsting for the blood of his opponents. A calmer judgment, however, shows us that seldom, if ever, was a trial for opinions conducted with larger guarantees of fairness, more openly, or more in accordance with the principles which the soundest leaders of thought at the time would approve. The methods of judicial inquiry in the sixteenth century and for a long time afterward were not pretty methods. The right of the accused to have counsel and to be placed on an equality, so far as opportunity was concerned, with the accusing party, was not recognized. Imprisonment was harsh, the means of extracting evidence were barbarous, and the tone of the judicial authorities toward the alleged criminal was such as to prejudice his case to the utmost. All these incidents were present in the trial of Servetus. There can be no doubt that Calvin—who, it must be remembered, held no office in Geneva other than that of its most respected preacher—pushed the case to its utmost limit. It has been shown, especially in recent treatments of this subject, that he had what may on the face of it be described as a personal interest in the issue. In spite of the success that had so far attended his work in Geneva, we must not forget that this success had been gained in the face of an opposition that was by no means overcome. Personal and family animosities had been developed that would have tested the strength of a far stronger governmental machine than he had at his disposal. The one indispensable condition of permanence for his work was that it should be held straight to the program with which it started—the establishment in Geneva of a civil state founded on the idea of the kingdom of God. To do this, it must above all else keep itself pure from even the suspicion of fanaticism or false doctrine.

The conviction of error within its borders was the most tangible form which such proof of Puritan thoroughness could take. If, therefore, such conviction was in a sense a personal victory for Calvin, we must remember that, aside from the triumph of principle, he had no ends of his own to gain. If we are tempted for a moment to compare him with those other tyrants who, for instance in the Italian republics, raised themselves and their families to wealth and hereditary power by methods of which we are here reminded, such a comparison breaks down at the start. No such ambition for personal or family honors stains the memory of Calvin. He threw himself into this prosecution of Servetus with all his energy because he believed that upon its success depended the victory of truth over falsehood and right over wrong.

It cannot serve our purpose to go, ever so slightly, into the miserable detail of the proceedings. From the beginning it was made clear that the real crime of Servetus was that which the dominant church has always correctly described as heresy; i.e., the crime of choosing one's opinions for one's self instead of accepting them from any authority whatever. It was not merely the opinions themselves. Even so moderate a person as Melancthon had admitted that the formulas of expression as to the divine nature contained much that was puzzling to the thoughtful mind. It was rather that attitude of the mind which the earliest church had instinctively expressed by the word from which we take our word "heresy"—the word "choice." He who dares to choose his belief must necessarily be wrong, and, as soon as the church had made its fatal alliance with the civil power, it inevitably took the next step and, attaching to the idea of free choice the further notion of moral depravity, invented the crime known as *haereticae pravitatis*. And this idea persisted. It is only the modern world that has come to recognize in honest heresy a title of honor. The leaders of the Reformation repudiated the charge with the utmost indignation, and, entering again into alliance with the civil powers, gained once more the means to shift the burden of theological freedom on to the shoulders of men who dared to go beyond the limits they themselves prescribed.

The case of Servetus was not the first in which the Genevan tribunals had vindicated the purity of their faith. In the previous six years there had been several notable instances of opposition to the dominant doctrine and discipline, and these had all so far been decided to the advantage of Calvin. Still, the hostility continued, and at the moment of the arrest of Servetus it seemed almost as if the strain were coming to be too great for his resources. It has been conjectured, with some show of reason, that Servetus was actually, though not openly, protected by these elements of the Genevan opposition—was, in short, made a tool for their purposes, and that to this fact is owing the prolongation of the trial and its apparent uncertainty. It would be strange indeed if considerations of this sort had not played their part in this as in other complications of Genevan politics; but it should not blind us to the real issue. What that issue was is clearly enough reflected in the replies of the other important churches of Switzerland to which Geneva referred the case for their opinion. Without a dissenting voice, the ministers of Zürich, Schaffhausen, Basel, and Bern, declared that the opinions of Servetus were contrary to the true faith; congratulated Geneva on having got him into its power, and expressed the hope that this pest of the Christian world would not be allowed further opportunity to corrupt the faithful with his horrid blasphemies. In no one of these replies is the punishment of death specifically mentioned, but the implication was enough. So far as the Protestant world was concerned, Calvin had nothing to fear. The Roman Catholic authorities at Vienne had sent a request that Servetus might be handed over to them; but Geneva replied that he could be properly attended to there.

It is evident to any one who reads the record of the court that the condemnation of Servetus was a foregone conclusion. His own attitude towards his judges was certainly not calculated to lessen the feeling of hostility. His confidence in himself and his open contempt of his accusers did not desert him for a moment. He was defiant to the last. It would be a satisfaction if one could make him rather more of an heroic figure; but it must be admitted that his account of himself was not always consistent and can in some places be shown to be incorrect. Calvin was

insistent for the sentence of death, but said what he could in favor of a merciful form of execution. Overcome for a moment by the announcement of his sentence, Servetus rallied at once and met his end with cheerful fortitude. With his last breath he called upon the name of Jesus, the Son of the eternal God.

Thus Genevan orthodoxy was vindicated. If Servetus had been willing to change the order of his last words and say "Jesus, the Eternal Son of God," he might, probably, have been set free. It was this which stamped him as the enemy of Christian truth, against whom every Christian man's hand ought to be raised in protest even to the point of his destruction. In reply to certain unofficial criticisms of his action Calvin wrote an extended refutation of the errors of Servetus, incorporating with this a defence of the principle of capital punishment for heresy. The essence of this defence is in its concluding paragraph. No sane man, he says, will deny that there are two good reasons for such punishment: first, if the man is so obstinate that he cannot be brought to reason by milder measures: second, if the content of his opinion is desperately vicious. Now in the case of Servetus both these reasons are combined. In other words, he was condemned for fidelity to his opinions and because those opinions seemed to the leaders of orthodox thought dangerous to the welfare of Christian society. It can hardly soften our judgment of Calvin that in this attack upon an enemy now beyond the reach of his assault, he should have chosen to employ the foulest and most insulting language in his choice vocabulary of abuse. That he acted throughout in what he believed to be the only right way there is as little doubt as there is that the execution of Servetus was a foul crime against the higher law of liberty which Calvin had himself followed in breaking away from the servitude of Rome. The spirit of persecution has never lacked arguments, and never will, whenever the fatal union of civil and religious power puts effective weapons into its hand.